



The Case for the Narrow View of Reading



Alan G. Kamhi

The Persistence of Reading Failure

- Although the gap between Hispanic, black, and white children has decreased over the last 13 years, the proportion of children reading below the basic level was above 35% until 2007 when it decreased to 33% for 4th grade children (NC = 36%)(NAEP, 2007).
- The numbers are somewhat better for 8th grade children. Only 26% are performing below basic level (NC = 29%).

Data in Search of an Explanation

- Why are more than one-third of our nation's 4th graders and more than one quarter of 8th graders reading below a basic level?
- Teachers (poorly trained)
- Students (high proportion of disadvantaged, ELL, disabled)
- Schools (not conducive to learning)
- Reading assessments (too stringent)
- Reading instruction (not evidence based)

Solutions to the Reading Crisis

- Better teacher training
- Improve school learning environments
- Make the NAEP assessment more similar to state assessments that show higher levels of reading performance.
- Eliminate state assessments. Make every state use NAEP (or equivalent) reading assessment.
- Fully fund NCLB

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- Reduce the number of ELL students by passing strict laws for illegal immigrants as AZ and OK have done. Only DC (61%), MS (49%), and LA (48%) have more students reading below basic level than CA (47%) and AZ (44%).
 - Prevent reading failure by identifying kindergarten children at risk for reading failure and providing evidence-based instruction within an RTI (Response to Instruction) service delivery model. Is this why TX (34%) with its large Hispanic population does much better than CA and AZ?

Same Old Same Old

- These solutions might have some impact on level of reading achievement (note 2005-2007 improvement), but as long as the Broad View of reading is reflected in high stakes assessment, our continued efforts to dramatically improve reading levels will be no more successful than our previous efforts over the last 25-30 years.

Broad View of Reading

- The Broad View of reading is familiar to most people and accepted by almost everyone.
- Reading = decoding + comprehension
- Emphasis on word recognition and higher-level thinking processes
- Thinking guided by print

The Problem with the Broad View

- It conflates two very different abilities: word recognition and comprehension
- Unclear what reading failure means?
Difficulty decoding, understanding, or both?
- What does it mean when a teachers says a 5th grader is reading at a first grade level?

Word Recognition is a teachable Skill

- Word recognition (decoding) is a skill that can be broken down into component parts (sounds, letters, sound-letter correspondences, orthographic sequences).
- It can be proceduralized and taught because it involves a narrow scope of knowledge that once acquired results in fast, accurate sight word recognition.

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- There are numerous evidence-based instructional programs that have been shown to effectively teach word reading to all but the most severely disabled students (cf. National Reading Panel, 2000), and most of these severely disabled readers can be taught word reading skills with intensive phonics programs (Torgesen, 2005).

Comprehension is not a Skill

- Comprehension is a complex of higher-level mental processes that include thinking, reasoning, imagining, and interpreting.
- What makes comprehension difficult to teach is that these processes are domain or content specific rather than domain/content general.

Knowledge is the Key for Comprehension

- This is why the best predictor of comprehension is familiarity with a content domain (Hirsch, 2006).
- Familiarity with the topic of a passage is in fact so important that poor decoders do better than good decoders when they have more knowledge of a topic than good readers (Recht & Leslie, 1988)

Knowledge Trumps Strategy Training

Because comprehension is knowledge dependent, instructional approaches that target general strategies will have limited impact on assessments that include diverse content domains (e.g., Willingham, 2006).

Processing Demands are Knowledge Dependent

- Low processing demands (attention, memory) for familiar topics. Interest and motivation are typically high.
- High processing demands for unfamiliar topics. Attention, interest and motivation are very important for understanding unfamiliar topics.

What This Means

- Assessing and improving comprehension is much more difficult than assessing and improving word recognition.
- Hirsch (2006) reported that it took 5 years of a knowledge-based curriculum to impact a measure of domain-general comprehension (i.e., standardized test of reading).

The Narrow View

- Reading = Word Recognition
- Difficulty learning to read = Difficulty becoming an accurate and fluent word-level reader.
- Promotes differentiated assessment of word-level reading and content knowledge acquisition.

The Narrow View = Dyslexia

- The narrow view is consistent with the definition of dyslexia (difficulty with accurate and fluent word recognition).
- So if one accepts the narrow view, dyslexia becomes the only true reading disability, and no further discussion is needed about the meaningfulness of the term, its place in education policy, research, teacher education, and instructional services

Advantages of the Narrow View

- Eliminates the reading crisis because all but the most severely disabled children can learn to read (defined as accurate and fluent word recognition).
- Teachers can teach their content areas without having to worry about how their students perform on conflated measures of reading.

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- Special educators and reading specialists benefit from the differential diagnosis of specific reading disabilities (dyslexia) and content-area learning problems.
 - Students benefit from the differentiated assessment of reading and content-area learning.

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- Students with dyslexia will receive empirically validated interventions designed to improve word-level reading and spelling.
 - Students who read proficiently will receive instruction that targets specific content area learning problems. These students will no longer be viewed as poor readers.
 - Students with both reading and knowledge-based deficiencies should, of course, receive instruction in both areas.

Improving Word Recognition

- What to teach?
- What knowledge/processes are required to learn to read?
- Design of instruction?

Important Factors in Learning to Decode

- A supportive print rich home
- Joint book-reading experiences
- Letter knowledge
- Phonological awareness
- Sound-letter correspondences
- Lexical knowledge
- Ability to notice and remember orthographic (spelling) patterns
- Word attack skills

Design of Instruction

- Combination of real reading with systematic phonics instruction.
- Wilson
- Language!
- LiPs
- Florida Center for Reading Research (fcrr.org)
- Simmons et al., (JLD-2007)

How Important is Fluency?

- Contrast 2 students, one who reads aloud fluently but has difficulty summarizing what he read and another who reads slowly, pauses often, and mispronounces words, but summarizes well.
- Recent study shows that fluency did not account for unique variance in predicting comprehension. Few students had difficulty in fluency separate from decoding accuracy and listening comprehension (Adlof et al., in press)

Factors that Influence Content Learning

- Learner factors
- Instructional factors
- Content domain
- Measurement factors

Learner Factors

- Language knowledge
- Reading ability (defined narrowly)
- Conceptual knowledge
- Processing abilities (attention, memory)
- Interest and motivation
- Engagement level
- Metacognitive abilities

Instructional Factors

- Instructional factors are less important for students with high ability and motivation.
- They are increasingly more important for students with low ability levels and low interest/motivation.
- A good teacher is someone who is able to teach students who have little or no initial interest in the content being taught.

Content Factors

- Nature of content (science, literature, history, math, music, etc.)
- Relevance
- Importance (EOG, college, trade)

Measurement Factors

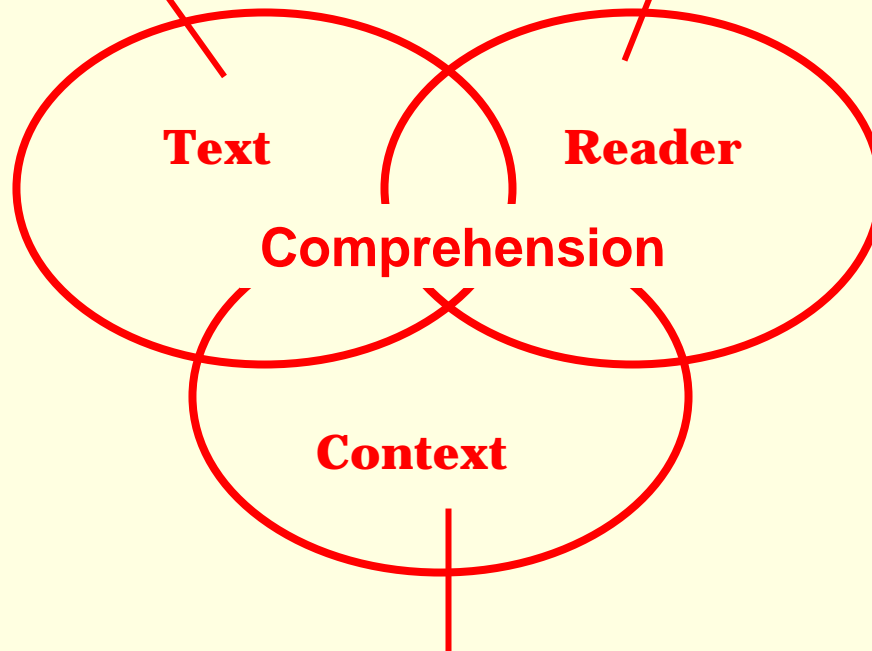
- Nature of assessment
 - curriculum-based (teacher driven)
 - standard-based (state/national)
- Type of assessment
 - multiple choice
 - short answer
 - essay/paper
 - oral exam

Levels of Learning/Understanding

- Elementary level (literal)
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- Analytical (critical/interpretive)
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- Comparative (creative)

Text structure, vocabulary,
print style and font,
discourse, genre,
motivating features

Word recognition,
vocabulary, background
knowledge, strategy use,
inference-making abilities,
motivation



Environment, purpose, social relations,
cultural norms, motivating features (e.g.
school/classroom climate, families,
peers)

Strategy Instruction

- Adjust reading to purposes and text
- Use background knowledge to make predictions
- Generate questions and interpretations while reading
- Visualize ideas and events
- Summarize periodically

NRP Evaluation of Strategy Teaching

- Major problem is teaching strategies in a natural reading context with readers of various levels.
- Strategies are not skills that can be taught by drill; they are plans for constructing meaning.
- Being strategic is much more than knowing individual strategies. Good learners will constantly alter, adjust, and modify until they construct meaning.

Concept Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI)

- Premise of CORI is that motivated students usually want to understand text content fully as a result will process information deeply (Guthrie et al., 2004).

How to Create Engaged Readers/Learners

- Make content goals prominent—focus on gaining meaning, building knowledge, and deep understanding rather than on skills and rewards.
- Use a wide range of texts and media to inundate students with information about a topic and give students choices of texts/media.
- Provide opportunities for independent reading/learning (Ivey & Fisher, 2005).

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- Use texts that are interesting and at the right level for each student---not too easy or difficult.
 - Use contemporary issues that help students see connections between the topic (history, science, etc.) and current events and their personal lives.

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- Allow students the opportunity to work collaboratively with ample opportunities for discussion, questioning, and sharing.
 - Teach don't test. (Try to avoid the typical classroom cycle of student reading, teacher questioning, student coming up short, teacher correcting).

SI vs. CORI

- Results of two studies (Guthrie et al., 2004) showed that CORI was more effective than TI and traditional instruction in improving reading comprehension, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and self-efficacy for reading.
- Guthrie et al. (2004). *Motivating reading comprehension: CORI*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Take Home Message

- Focus on content learning—constructing meaning, deep understanding—not strategy learning/application.
- Balance explicit instruction with extended discussions with teacher scaffolds to facilitate understanding.

How to Facilitate Discussion

- Ask questions that encourage students to take an aesthetic stance toward the ideas and knowledge they are being exposed to in class and in their readings.
- To facilitate these reactions, teachers need to create an environment in which the information they are presenting can be linked to students' background knowledge and personal interests whenever possible.

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- If students are asked factual questions about a text or questions about the main idea, that may be all they learn.
 - Questions should lead to aesthetic responses about the information presented in a class or text.

Asking the Right Questions

- What made the book interesting?
- Did you like the book? Why or why not?
- Are there characters in the books you would like to have as friends?
- What would you change in the story?

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- If you could meet the author, what would you say?
 - What other things would you like to see happen in the book?
 - Have you ever experienced some of the events or feelings that the characters in the book experienced?

Questioning the Author (QtA)

- Initiating queries
 - What is the author trying to say here?
 - What is the author's message?
 - What is the author talking about?
- Follow-up queries
 - Does this make sense with what the author told us before?
 - Did the author explain this clearly?
 - Why does the author tells us this now?

How Schools Can Improve Reading Performance

- Embrace RTI which identifies young children at risk for reading failure and provides additional instruction and remediation to prevent reading failure.
- Employ teachers who have experience using empirically-validated approaches to teach reading.

How Schools Can Improve Content-Area Learning

- Have common goals and strategies across all content area instruction: English, science, social studies, art, physical education, music, and shop (Hoover HS, San Diego) (Ivey & Fisher, 2006).
- Employ knowledgeable and passionate content area teachers.

The Case for the Narrow View: Reprise

Embracing a particular point of view does not by itself revolutionize teaching or learning.
Under a narrow view, what does it mean to practice what we preach?

Answer

- It means differentiated assessment and diagnosis of learning problems. Reading problems are differentiated from content-area learning problems.
- Recognize that improving domain-general comprehension is difficult. Better to focus on content specific knowledge acquisition (e.g., science, history, math, literature).

Question/Answer

Under a narrow view, what meaning does the ubiquitous term "reading comprehension" have?

The ubiquitous term is problematic because it obscures the influence of background knowledge, motivation, and interest. It assumes comprehension is a unitary measurable skill like word-level reading.

Answer

We should stop talking about assessing or teaching reading comprehension as if it were a single entity.

We should assess comprehension of familiar/unfamiliar texts with measures that evaluate sentence and text-level understanding (e.g., think alouds) and different levels of interpretation (e.g., QRI).

Question/Answer

How should content knowledge be assessed?

With curriculum-based measures or EOG content-area assessments. Some states have content-area assessments (e.g., NY Regents exams).

Question/Answer

- How should content area teaching be improved?
- Use approaches like CORI that focus on student engagement and content area learning.
- Have common goals and strategies across all content area instruction.

What to do now?

- Acknowledge the advantages of the narrow view of reading as we operate under the broad view.
- Provide differentiated assessment of reading, domain-general comprehension, and content-specific knowledge.
- Provide differentiated instruction of reading and content knowledge.

Contact/References

■ agkamhi@uncg.edu

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